

# NBC Sports Group Media Conference

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**Mike Tirico**

**Drew Brees**

Press Conference

THE MODERATOR: Joining us on today's call is Mike Tirico and Drew Brees.

MIKE TIRICO: Thanks, Dan. Happy Thanksgiving. Given that our accolades where Drew has the most passing yards in any stadium in the history of the league, and my Thanksgiving game got canceled last year, you probably want to hear more from Drew than me, which is absolutely fine. I'll clear the decks here in a minute.

Needless to say, we all love football. Any of us on the call, most of the people that you're writing for, there's nothing like Thanksgiving with football and family. And the opportunity to be involved with football has been great for me over the couple of decades of Thanksgiving college games for eight years and now the NFL games with the NBC package on Thanksgiving evening. To do this and then bounce over to Baltimore to join Cris Collinsworth for the Browns and Ravens, a very important game for the AFC North.

One comment on Drew. We've done seven Notre Dame games and probably a dozen studio shows here in Drew's early start in the business. I just think it's been really great to watch how hard Drew has worked at this because he's doing something that's unique. He's coming in and being a studio analyst for the NFL and calling games for college. And I think most of you know that's really two different skill sets. And obviously very different pools to jump into.

And it's been a blast. I've learned so much watching games with Drew. Talking, traveling, all that stuff it's been fun. It will be a thrill to be back in the dome with fans as Drew's there in a very different capacity. And he sees the Superdome from the perspective we've seen it all these years.

DREW BREES: Thank you, Mike. I reciprocate all those feelings about you as well. It's been an absolute pleasure to have the chance to work beside Mike here broadcasting these past seven home Notre Dame games. Have



certainly learned a ton and have really had a lot of fun doing it.

Mike said it, too. Thanksgiving, probably one of my favorite holidays. I very much relate Thanksgiving to football. I remember as a kid going out in the backyard on Thanksgiving Thursdays. My brother Reid and I would throw on our sweats and we would play football in the backyard. That was like a family tradition. Had the chance to play on Thanksgiving a few times in the NFL, all with the Saints, which have been some pretty enjoyable experiences.

I think we had, all three of those victories -- one at Dallas, one here in New Orleans and one maybe in Atlanta. And now this joy of broadcasting for me as well.

So you combine all those together on this coming Thursday night and obviously returning to the Dome for the first time with fans in about two years for me. All of that shakes up to be a pretty incredible night. No place I'd rather be. And really, really looking forward to it.

**Q. Drew what's your impressions of Derek Carr's season and what stood out from the time with Olson at Purdue?**

DREW BREES: It's obviously been a tough season with all the circumstances for the Raiders. I thought they started off really, really well. I think Derek Carr was playing some really really good football. I can recall us sitting in the studio those first three weeks watching the Raiders play and specifically watching Derek Carr and just saying how good he looked and how comfortable he looked. And they just seemed to be hitting on all cylinders as an offense.

And Greg Olson is now the play caller and has been in the NFL a long time. Greg Olson was my quarterback coach in college for four years. He's been one of my mentors. He's been -- had such a great relationship with him for almost 25 years now. And I think wherever he's gone he's been very well respected and really done a great job. And certainly seems like him and Derek Carr have a great relationship and great rapport.

So you hope for them as a team even despite all the circumstances that down the stretch here they'll be able to kind of pull it together and put together some good wins



and get back in the race there in the AFC West. I know it's a tough decision, and it's only getting tougher with the way the Chargers and the Chiefs are playing now.

**Q. For both of you, wondering what it's been like being in the studio watching the fourth quarter of that Chargers Steelers games Sunday night? And then, Drew, just your thoughts, since I know you were here during mini camp on the Chargers and Herbert's development, and how you see the AFC West going the rest of the way?**

MIKE TIRICO: As we leave at the end of the third quarter, so as we're heading back to the hotel, thinking that the game is in hands for the Chargers. And then the Steelers start with the blocked punt. And we have our group chat and our text chain. And we're going back and forth with me and Tony and Drew about what's going on and where did this offense come from.

It was a heck of a fourth quarter. As entertaining a fourth quarter as we've had all year. But I would say that's one of those games that shows you a little bit what Drew said in our studio show -- there's just a different feel around Brandon Staley that maybe the way the Chargers lost games like that in the past, it's starting to turn a little bit. That's one where you've seen the Chargers lose in that script a dozen times.

And to get one of those to stay right in the thick of things and the big head-to-head tiebreaker impactful victory over a Pittsburgh team that will be battling for a playoff spot as well, that's a huge win, engineered especially with that big throw from the guy who Drew thinks so much of in Justin Herbert.

DREW BREES: I'll pick up there. There's very few teams where you truly say they always have a chance based on the quarterback. And I think the Chargers are one of those teams.

When you have a guy like that who has so many physical tools but I think what you're starting to see, too, is just with more and more games under his belt, a level of maturity and just the way that he's playing the game, I thought there were so many plays last night that were indicative of that growth as a young quarterback.

How many times did he take off and run on third down to get a first down to keep a drive going? In a game where I think he knew that they had to be really efficient, knowing that their defense has been struggling a bit. And the Steelers have a chance to make big plays, which they did down the stretch.

But that throw that he made to take the lead there as they lost it in the third quarter was, like, I wish we were looking at it together on film, because I know the play, because I know their offense. It's Joe Lombardi, right? He was our quarterback coach here with the Saints when I was here for so long. And it's the same offense.

But, like, I'm watching his eyes in the replay and the way that he peaks the safety. And he knows the safety isn't getting to the deep path like he's supposed to. He feels the corner jump the slot route, so he knows he's got Mike Williams down the sideline. And he's got the arm strength to get it there before the safety can get there. Just all these things like you have to assess in a split second as a quarterback. And it's like mastery. When you see it all comes together it's like, man, that's it.

But at a critical situation, too. That was pretty impressive. And, again, he's just one of those guys that they could be down 14, they could be down 17, they always have a chance. They've got a guy like him who can make plays all over the field. And offensively they're so explosive.

**Q. For this Thanksgiving night game, it seems like both teams, they both need a win to kind of get momentum back.**

DREW BREES: So I think you look at both -- in my opinion, the Saints defense and the Buffalo defense have been probably the two most consistent defenses all year long. If you look at them week after week, the games they've put together and just the way they've played, it's been very, very consistent.

Both these past two games were a little bit of aberrations with the amount of rushing yards they gave up -- Steelers, what, 260-plus and the Saints about 240-plus. So that was a bit unusual. Both those were pretty good run defenses.

And I think, too, their offenses aren't really playing well right now. They're turning the ball over. They kind of put them in tough spots, which probably contributed to that as well.

But you're right, both of them are in situations, I think, within their division -- and, look, Buffalo was three games ahead in their division couple weeks ago. And now New England has kind of jumped them. Obviously they're going to play New England twice over the next four weeks after this. So a lot will be said with those two games.

The Saints on the other hand, I think they're in a really tough spot just because they have so many injuries on the offensive side of the ball mainly. So they just don't have much continuity. Defensively, I think that's been the one

real consistent spot. And yet at the same time, man, they just have to find a way to start games faster. They've been so slow starting these games the last three weeks, that they've been down double digits, and by the time they get to the fourth quarter they're having to create some miraculous comeback and that's just too little too late.

So they've got to find a way to generate some more points and some more opportunities to start games and at least keep the games close. And I think they have the type of makeup on the team, leadership wise and everything else, to win tight games but they've just got to keep them tight.

**Q. I'm writing a feature on Terron Armstead. Could you share insight why the team voted him the Ed Block Courage Award winner last year, and what it was like to play with him as a teammate for so long?**

DREW BREES: Yeah, shoot, I've played with Terron since 2013. He came in as a third-round pick. Didn't start right away. I'll remember his first start like it was yesterday. He started against Carolina at Carolina. It was a huge game. And he had to go up against -- was it Kevin Hardy --

**Q. Greg Hardy.**

DREW BREES: Greg Hardy, that's right. Was kind of like one of the best pass rushers in the division. And I remember Terron just had an incredible game. Like, this guy didn't even touch me.

I think he's always been one of those guys that you just felt like was ready for the big-time. Like nothing really fazed him. He's obviously an incredible athlete. More so than that, he's developed into a real pro and a great leader on the team. The guys really respect him. He does things the right way.

He's obviously battled his fair share of injuries. And I think in most cases that's what the Ed Block Courage Award represents, guys who have had to overcome adversity both personal and physical. He lost his brother last year during the year, which was such a tough thing for him. And gets COVID during that time as well. So having to deal with that, overcome that, as well as all the injuries that he just continues to battle with. There's no perfect person to represent what that award stands for.

**Q. To ask you, a couple of years ago Josh Allen and the Bills played on Thanksgiving. They went to Dallas and got a pretty big win for that franchise. Just wondering if you would kind of agree that that win sort of solidified them on the national stage as bona fide playoff-type team, playoff contenders? Drew, in regards to Josh Allen, was there a moment where you**

**sort of recognized, wow, this guy might have something special? If there was, when was it? And maybe your impressions of Josh's season to this point.**

MIKE TIRICO: I can tell you that I remember being in the press box getting ready to call the Saints-Falcons game, Drew playing, of course, in 2019, watching the Buffalo/Dallas game. Usually when we do the night game on Thanksgiving, you watch that afternoon game, the Lions game at your hotel and then head over to the stadium and catch as much of the second game as you can before you start really the last few minutes before your game getting ready.

And we're watching Buffalo just empty out the playbook, man, and just do everything. Right? That was one of those, when you saw the schedule came out, you go, really going to put Buffalo and a second-year quarterback in Dallas on Thanksgiving? And they were ready for the moment. They had a great season. If memory serves me right there were 7- or 8-3 going into that game. That was a real statement to do it on that stage against the Cowboys.

Josh was terrific. He scrambled a bunch. Maybe just under a dozen times or so. Singletary ran well. And Cole Beasley going back to Dallas had a great game. And all the players who needed to step up stepped up and without a doubt got everyone's attention for how good that Buffalo team could be.

And I think we saw that as they went on into the rest of that season and obviously last year at -- Thanksgiving is a stage where you do things and it's remembered for a long time. Anytime somebody blocks a field goal now you say, Leon Lett, don't touch it. So that stage is a big one in NFL. And the Bills stepped on it in Jerry-world and have been right center stage in the NFL since that point.

Now you get a little adversity and you feel the pressure that the Dallases, the Pittsburghs, those flagship franchises feel on a regular basis of what's wrong with this team as they go through a little tough patch.

And on Thanksgiving they had another chance to remind everybody how good they are. So it could come in a couple year's full circle for them in that regard.

DREW BREES: So you asked me the question about when did I recognize that Josh Allen had this type of talent. As I recall, was it his rookie year when they went and played at Houston -- Texans, in the playoffs?

**Q. That was the second year. After the victory.**

DREW BREES: So that was then. Okay, so when they made the playoffs and they go to Houston, I know that resulted in a loss. But down the stretch there, in that game, he made some plays that really, really gave them a chance to potentially win that game. And that's when I think I recognized, man, from an athletic perspective there's really not many guys like that.

He's got some really rare athletic traits. And combined with a big arm and once he developed some experience and they really have a chance to build that offense around him, he's going to be able to really do some things. And sure enough, last year he put a lot of that on display.

And I know this year hasn't been quite as consistent. They're going through some pains but I think that's all part of the process as well. He's definitely shown a lot, though.

**Q. Drew, is this going to be able to be a family/work trip; are you going to be able to have everybody there for the halftime thing and so forth? And, second, what are your expectations emotionally and professionally for covering a Saints game? And are you going to try to be objective or are you just going to just ask everybody to forgive you for maybe being a little partisan?**

DREW BREES: Well, the good thing is that I've already had a little bit of experience with this when Purdue played at Notre Dame this year and I was asked the exact same questions. And I was able to stay very objective, even though I was a Purdue grad and we played against Notre Dame four times when I was in school and all the rivalry and all that other stuff.

I do have a job to do. And I'm going to be a pro. And so I don't think anybody has to worry about that. I will call it as I see it. And I will try to give everybody a very enjoyable experience from my perspective with my insight alongside Mike.

As far as just kind of the moment of being back in the Dome, that's definitely going to be a great moment. I mean, anytime we get a chance to step inside the Superdome, whether you're a player or a fan or broadcasting the game, it's just an electric environment. I'm looking forward to it, especially the fact I haven't been inside the dome with fans in almost two years. So it will be a great experience.

Yeah, my family's flying in. So they'll be there. It's very much a work trip for me. Like, I'm just in the middle of preparation right now to broadcast this game, the same way I would as if I was playing in it. So the analysis on both sides of the ball, studying both teams so that we can

put together the best broadcast that we can.

**Q. Cris Collinsworth told me, when I asked him if Buffalo was the toughest place for an analyst to hear criticism, he said no, actually the toughest place, believe it or not, is Cincinnati, because people expect him to be pro-Cincinnati. In that case, Drew, are you prepared for criticism not so much -- probably as much -- but just as many from New Orleans people who don't think you're as complimentary as they would like you to be?**

DREW BREES: Well, if they give me something to be complimentary about I'll be complimentary. Look, look, I have a job to do. I'm a broadcaster for NBC. And, listen, I love the game of football. I love broadcasting the game of football.

And my job, when I'm in the booth, is to try to articulate the game in the best way that I possibly can to the fans. Exactly what's happening on the field. To be very impartial. To talk about both teams the exact same way from the perspective of, listen, we'll have storylines. We'll have personal interactions that we'll have throughout the week with players, with coaches, talk big picture, obviously focus on what's happening on the field and try to dive deeper into some of the explanation of that. Give fans some great insight into my knowledge of the game from being in that Saints offense for so many years and knowing a lot about Buffalo's offense and defense as well from my film study.

So, listen, at the end of the day I think that's really what fans want. They want a deeper dive and great insight into what's happening on the field, and not for us to take away from it, but for us to add to it.

**Q. When I asked about the question about New Orleans fans going after you. Do you anticipate any of that?**

DREW BREES: No, I don't.

**Q. We just saw the Ravens win without Lamar Jackson, but as you look ahead for them playing tougher teams, how dependent do you think they are on him sort of playing great to be competitive against the other really good teams? And then also what have you seen from him in terms of his progress as a passer this weekend? I know he's worked with some of the same coaches that worked with you, Drew. Where do you see his progress on that front?**

DREW BREES: Are you talking about Baker?





**Q. No, Lamar.**

DREW BREES: Oh. I have not had a chance to really watch them a lot, especially from the perspective of just like studying their passing game or like his mechanics or the things that you might be referring to, from the perspective of kind of working with some of the same guys.

I think just from watching him over the years, man, there's not a more competitive guy. Like, you can feel that when you watch the game. I've had a little interaction with Lamar just from a Pro Bowl a few years back. In fact, my oldest son, Baylen, was a huge Lamar Jackson fan. It was his dream at the time to meet Lamar.

I had a chance to bring Baylen in and meet Lamar before one of their practices. And Lamar signed a helmet for him and kind of got a chance to spend some time with him. It was actually pretty cool.

But, no, I have admired his journey thus far, and kind of watching that offense be built around him and his skill set. He's got such a unique skill set. And with everything that they went through, too, early in the season with losing so many guys to injury, especially running backs, I think it goes to show that that offense revolves around him.

And you can plug in a lot of other pieces. As long as you've got him, he can make it work. And they've positioned themselves really well in that division now.

MIKE TIRICO: Getting ready for the game, if Cleveland wins, you're going to have, with six weeks left, that entire division separated by a game, with eight games of divisional competition down the stretch. So a Cleveland win compacts this thing to a place where we've really never seen an NFL division with almost everybody a game to two games over .500 with five, six weeks left in the season and so many head-to-head games.

Those games against each other in the AFC North are going to be incredible. And a lot of it pins Cleveland being able to get the win in Baltimore, which will not be easy given the injury status and what's going on with Baker this week and all that stuff. So, super fascinating game and one that will impact Pittsburgh and Cincinnati going down the stretch. And those teams play earlier in the day.

**Q. Baker question. Obviously he's been playing hurt, left shoulder, for almost the entire season. And lately in the last couple of weeks it's been a heel and a knee. Not playing well lately. And he was so frustrated, he did not even do his postgame news conference after the game. I'm wondering, from your perspective, if you were advising the Browns, Drew, how would you have**

**them approach the situation with Baker? Obviously he's under contract through next season with a fifth-year option but not beyond that. And this season's kind of gone sideways on him.**

DREW BREES: They've had some variables this year. Obviously I think the toughest part is when the expectations are so high, which they were coming into this season. I think everybody kind of had them pegged as being a top three AFC team.

And man, they've had their fair share of injuries and various things have happened that have certainly affected that. Maybe some of the internal stuff with OBJ as well and a defense trying to find itself a little bit as well. I think we know who they are offensively. They're a run-first offense.

And I think we've seen that when Nick Chubb is healthy and they've got that run game going, they're a really formidable team. But it kind of starts there.

I think for Baker, listen, I know what it's like to have some of those injuries. Probably had a lot of the same injuries that he's dealing with right now. And they're no fun. Do they affect you? Yes, they affect you? They affect your weekly preparation because you've got to spend so much time on your rehab, prehab. Just taking care of your body and just getting to Sunday. But at the end of the day there's a different way to win each week.

Even though there's times where you might not be 100 percent or you may not have your "A" game or all of the tools in the toolbox, you just you've got to find what you do have and find a way to go out there and make it work to get you the win.

There's a different way to do that each and every week. So I think we're going to learn a lot about them over the next the remainder of this season. They obviously have some subdivisional games coming up. And like Mike just said, that division is very, very close. They could be right back in it very quickly.

So the story's yet to be written there. I think for them it's just a matter of tuning out all the noise and just focusing on the business at hand.

**Q. Drew, I don't know if you've been able see Miami at all, the Baltimore game on Thursday night, the London game was a national telecast. But as you know, basically there's six weeks for Tua to prove to the Dolphins management that he should be their guy long term and they should not pursue Watson. From what you've seen of Tua, do you have any conviction about**

**whether he's a long-term solution, or is that unclear to you?**

DREW BREES: You know, it's tough when you start making judgments on a guy with still so little game action. I mean, from last year to this year -- obviously he's battled injuries along the way as well. There's times when I watch Tua and, man, he plays really, really well with the exception of maybe one or two plays in the game. And unfortunately those one or two plays was a pick or a negative play or just that something impacted the game in a way where it was a close game and all of a sudden that became detrimental.

I think that every young quarterback goes through that, where you really have to learn at the NFL level what it takes to win but, more importantly, what it takes not to lose.

And I would say just the Dolphins overall, over the last two years, they're a young team. And they're a team that's still learning and growing and kind of developing who they are and how to win. Or more importantly how not to lose.

And they're in a tough division with Buffalo and New England. Right? So they have obviously those guys to contend with on an annual basis.

But I think it's too soon to make any judgments on Tua, and it's unfortunate that all that's been swirling in the air around him. Even at the start of the season there was all this talk about how Miami was going to be making the trade for Deshaun Watson. For a quarterback to have that going on in the periphery at all times, it's tough when you don't feel like you've got really everybody buying in to you and trying to build around it. So it's a tough situation for him but he's got to worry about the things he can control and just focus on helping his team win each and every week.

I think their team is playing, what I've seen over the last two weeks, I think they found their rhythm. They struggled early on in the season when expectations were high but I think they're still trying to find it a little bit.

**Q. I have a Baker Mayfield question. He was talking about how disappointed he was in his accuracy Sunday against the Lions. And he's one of the most accurate passers ever. Did you notice anything in his mechanics and how the series of injuries that he's dealing with could affect that.**

DREW BREES: It absolutely affects it. I saw him -- the game that he came back after injury, I remember seeing just in pregame, they had the camera on him a lot, talking about him coming back and he had the shoulder harness on. And I'm just watching him throw. And I'm, like, man,

that's a different throwing motion.

Like his mechanics are altered a little bit based on the fact that he doesn't have his same range of motion with what he would typically be doing with his front side, with his left side.

And you can survive for a little bit with those adjustments, but long term those become habits that you develop and that can definitely affect you, affect your accuracy. So that combined with -- that was just my observation with his left shoulder. I don't know the extent of the knee or whatever else. But certainly all those things play a factor.

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